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SUBJECT: CONTINUED MUSLIM OUTREACH FOLLOWING NEWSWEEK

RETRACTION

REF: A. STATE 90992

[B.](#) PARIS 3413

11. Summary: As requested in reftel A and initially reported in reftel B, Post has continued its outreach to French Muslim contacts following Newsweek's retraction of its story alleging desecration of the Koran at Guantanamo. Post and Consulate Strasbourg issued press releases to contacts and the media, spoke to senior officials in France's leading Muslim organizations, and will continue to clarify the situation as appropriate in our ongoing interactions. End Summary.

12. Poloff raised the issue of the Newsweek article with Grand Mosque of Paris Communication Consultant Slimane Nadour on May 19. Nadour told us that he fully understood that the allegations of U.S. interrogators at Guantanamo Bay desecrating the Koran were untrue and had been retracted. Nadour said that the Grand Mosque of Paris had been contacted by the Iranian press and asked to comment on the story. The response, on behalf of both the Grand Mosque and the presidency of the Council for the Muslim Faith (CFCM), underlined that the story was completely false. Poloff thanked Nadour for the support of the Grand Mosque of Paris in making sure that the matter was being accurately characterized in the media.

13. The Consulate in Strasbourg received requests May 19 for official statements regarding the Newsweek allegations from the Grand Mosque of Strasbourg and the "Meditation and Prevention Cell" of the Urban Community of Strasbourg. The requesting organizations wished to use the information during Friday prayers May 20 to counter a planned May 21 protest by the hardline, fringe French Muslim Party (PMF) initially planned against the GOF and its 2004 law banning headscarves in public schools, but expanded to include the USG after the Newsweek allegations. Drawing from ref A and Secretary Rice's May 12 testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee, Post and Consulate Strasbourg provided the Strasbourg Mosque with a press release explaining the inaccuracies and retraction of the Newsweek article, which was also sent to 62 foreign affairs journalists from both the French and Arab/Muslim media.

14. News reports following the May 21 protest indicate that approximately 200-300 demonstrators attended the PMF protest, during which PMF president Mohamed Latreche criticized the attitude of American soldiers and perpetuated false claims they desecrated the Koran. Latreche similarly attacked French president Jacques Chirac, whom he called an "Islamophobe," characterizing him as using "secularism to mislead the French people." (Note: The PMF was created by Latreche for the 1997 general election, in which it won 0.92% of the vote in one of Strasbourg's wards but has not fielded candidates in any subsequent elections. Although Latreche claimed 2,000 adherents in early 2004, authorities believe he has only about 150 hard core sympathizers. Latreche's demonstration may have been intended to jockey for support in advance of regional Muslim Council elections. End note.)

15. In a May 23 meeting, Poloffs ensured that Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF) secretary general Fouad Alaoui was fully informed of developments in the Newsweek story. (Note: The fundamentalist-leaning UOIF includes over 200 Muslim groups in France and has been accused of radicalism and links to the Muslim Brotherhood. Nevertheless, it works closely with the GOF as a key player within the government-created CFCM, where it claims to have the largest base of popular support. End Note.) Alaoui indicated that he was aware of the retraction, stating that the UOIF had known of the debate about the veracity of the report and thus had chosen not to make any public statements regarding the allegations. Poloffs took the opportunity to present Alaoui with talking points and the Secretary's comments on the issue.

16. Comment: Interactions with several of the main French Muslim organizations reflect a broad understanding of the facts surrounding the Newsweek story. The defense of the USG position by the Grand Mosque of Paris, the proactive outreach from the Strasbourg groups, and the caution of the UOIF reaction demonstrate responsible leadership on the matter from the respective organizations. End Comment.

